

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

14 April, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

The Hon. David S. Ferriero
Archivist of the United States
U.S. National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road College Park, MD 20740-6001

Dear President Biden and Mr. Ferriero:

We are writing to urge you to take prompt action to address the current backlog of 480,000 requests for military service records from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). As you know, NPRC significantly decreased onsite staffing and operations in St. Louis, MO during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In a typical year, NPRC responds to more than 1.2 million requests for copies of service records in its custody, usually within ten days. In contrast, since March of 2020, NPRC has responded to only about 288,000 requests.¹ We would like to work with you to improve processes to digitize records, informational technology (IT) systems and internal policies, which would make it easier for veterans and their families to request these records digitally, and NPRC staff to provide the information to our constituents.

Ready access to their military records is an obligation we owe to veterans and their families. We understand that working remotely has complicated NPRC's ability to process these request as approximately 90 percent of the records are on microfilm or paper. A slowdown in processing the vital service records held at NPRC affects our veterans' and their families' ability to access Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare, benefits, and other services they have earned. This is especially troubling because more veterans have had to rely on these essential VA services during the pandemic and consequent economic downturn.

A March 8, 2021 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) press release cited recently improving public health trends related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted plans to return more NPRC employees to work at the St. Louis facility. NARA also noted its use of emergency funds from Congress to purchase computer equipment to enable more NPRC employees to work remotely; hire additional employees and contractors; expand the workweek to include Saturdays and some Sundays; and implement a second weekday shift. These steps are encouraging, and we would like a detailed response from NARA leadership regarding its plan and timeline for reducing the backlog.²

¹ NARA Press Release, "National Personnel Records Center Prepares for Expansion of Onsite Workforce," Mar. 8, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2021/nr21-30>

² *Id.*

To ensure that we fulfill our obligations to our veterans and their families, we urge you to act swiftly to ensure that NPRC can process records requests efficiently and effectively. We also request the Administration to provide updates on plans to reduce the current backlog of requests, and provide us with details regarding record digitization efforts and any internal policy changes to improve processing record requests in a remote working environment. We look forward to working with you to reduce the NPRC backlog, and in turn, ensure our nation's veterans and their families promptly receive the VA care, benefits, and other services they deserve.

Respectfully,



Rob Portman
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator